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voyage—over the ocean to heathen lands! And I am always starting out and bearing you along! For I am your moulder, I am strong—I am a surprise, I am a shock—I am a dazzling passion of hope—I am a grim executioner! I am reality—I am life! I am the book that has no end!”

THE BREATH OF LIFE. By JOHN BURROUGHS. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915.

The revolt of human feeling or intuition against a purely mechanistic conception of nature is evinced in *The Breath of Life* by John Burroughs. The author speculates rather than philosophizes. He does not pin his faith to the vitalistic or panpsychic interpretation which obviously attracts him, nor does he attempt to make all human values depend upon it. He merely wishes to feel thoroughly at home in the universe. “I have a good deal of trouble,” he confesses frankly, “in trying to make my inborn idealism go hand in hand with my inborn naturalism . . . but may I not hope to make the face of my naturalism beam with the light of the ideal—the light that never was in the physico-chemical order, and never can be there?”

The intelligent layman fairly well acquainted with popular scientific literature will find in this book rather little that is new or especially suggestive. The dominant thought is that no refinement of physics or chemistry can explain what it is that controls and directs mechanical and chemical forces in living things, so that “one compounding of elements begets a cabbage and another compounding of the same elements begets an oak—one mixture of them and we have a frog, another and we have a man.” Chemistry can reveal the secret of the most complex chemical compounds, but it cannot explain “that adjustment of parts to each other, the coördination of their activities that makes a living machine.” Nor can science make intelligible the genesis of consciousness: the evolutionary account is, of course, inadequate, since it is impossible to conceive of a “half-way house between being and not being.”

The author explores with zest every nook and cranny of his subject. His glowing imagination gives a fire-new interest to notions that have oft been thought but ne’er so well expressed. His book, however, seems to be made up of essays written at different times and without any particular sequence. The discourse as a whole gives little sense of progress, and contains a good deal of substantial repetition. The author’s characteristic candor and simplicity disarm criticism; but if it were not for John Burroughs’ poetic power, *The Breath of Life* would be tedious.